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When Indians Became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West

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tendency to blame others for his mistakes. Remarkably well integrated, these essays reinvigorate the debate over Sutter and offer a new perspective on how society should assess its historical figures.

When Indians Became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West, by Peter Iverson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. xxi, 266 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CRAIG MINER, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

This book is, at base, a study of adaptation of cultures to change—change that was at first relatively slow and then increasingly, impossibly rapid. The cowboy and the Indian, well-worn stereotypes, symbolize the gulf of cultural differences, while Indian cowboys are at once admirable and, in a way, a humiliation. Livestock itself—the cattle and the horses that are at the core of stockraising cowboy culture—were not part of Native American culture until the seventeenth century. It is a tribute to tribal adaptability that so much of this intrusion became so well integrated that it was thought of as Indian “traditional,” but none of it had the force of thousands of years.

Iverson has collected a series of essays on the theme of Indian cattle ranching. As such, it is hardly a continuous history, and it is very broad in geographical and chronological coverage. Scholars will appreciate the coverage of the New Deal and the twentieth century into the 1960s, as well as the little-known stories of ranching on the northern Plains and Indian rodeo riders.

But there are compromises in this approach. The native cattle industry in Indian Territory and Oklahoma gets, considering the documentation on it, brief coverage. The sources are mostly published ones, often scholarly books and articles, rather than primary material from the National Archives, court cases, government documents, and the popular magazines, which might have enhanced the book from different directions. Iverson covers the legalities of leasing and ranching, but he is unable to portray fully the complexities of either Indian or white motivations in what was a significant policy debate in the nineteenth century. It was really a question of defining “civilization,” and cattle raising was a key to acculturation even before the Dawes Act. One native reaction is typified by the tribe that went on a hunt and shot for meat the cattle and oxen given to it under a treaty, while, on the other extreme, there were sophisticated business people among tribal leaders who were well prepared

to go into the ranching business either themselves or through controlled leases had not federal policy been ambiguous when it came right down to it.

This is a book not only sympathetic to the strengths of and the strains on Indian culture since the Civil War, but one that often dramatically illustrates in a simple narrative of events the awkwardness for the native people of the "development" of the West. Certainly Iverson's final conclusion that group cultural identity need not be seen as fixed and can change, given a little time and understanding, is well documented by his text. The question is not whether Indians can change, but, as Iverson puts it, "Will the urban West still afford sufficient room for people who know more than a little about particular landscapes, about generations, about the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk?" (224).

The Prairie in Nineteenth-Century American Poetry, by Steven Olson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. xi, 211 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BERNICE E. GALLAGHER, LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

For most of the nineteenth century, prairies existed in all of Iowa, the northern half of Illinois, the southwestern and western part of Minnesota, the northwestern part of Missouri, parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, and the Texas panhandle. Steven Olson argues that nineteenth-century poetic images of the American prairie were more than depictions and characterizations of an impressive physical landscape, however. Prairies became poetic symbols that incorporated the people, imagination, ideology, and place that existed in the United States during the nineteenth century. Tracing the use of the prairie metaphor from William Cullen Bryant through Walt Whitman, Olson shows how poets confronted the openness of America, celebrated its potential for good, acknowledged its potential to destroy, and reflected the growing tension between nationalistic ideals and paradoxical conditions existing in a democratic society. Collectively, the prairie poets created a new American poetry, one that is characterized by opposition: "public versus private, the individual versus the democracy, artistic freedom versus artistic constraints, personal freedom and equality versus slavery, manifest destiny versus genocide, abundance versus destruction, nature versus civilization, nationalism versus internationalism, hope for the future versus spiritual degeneration" (171).

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